

Misinformation and Trusted Voices – DCMS Committee Inquiry Response by The Learned Society of Wales September 2022

1. The Learned Society of Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DCMS Committee's inquiry on Misinformation and Trusted Voices.

Introduction

2. The Learned Society of Wales is Wales's national academy for arts, humanities and sciences. Our Fellowship brings together experts from across all academic fields and beyond. We use this collective knowledge to promote research, inspire learning, and provide independent policy advice.
3. Established in 2010, the Society is a registered charity, and secured its Royal Charter in 2015. It has over 650 Fellows, and nine staff (seven FTE).
4. The Learned Society of Wales does not receive annual or recurring funding from either the Welsh or UK Governments. In 2021 a partnership was established with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and the Society receives a grant to deliver agreed programmes in the area of researcher development.

What role should the National Academies have in being a source of authoritative, trustworthy information?

5. The Society commissioned research in 2017, which identified a need in Wales for the Society's independent, respected, authoritative, and impartial voice.
6. Drawing on this, one of the aims within the Learned Society of Wales' 2018-2023 Strategy is to **contribute expertise** – to coordinate expert responses to consultations, to support evidence-informed policy making, and harness our expertise to lead conversations key areas. The strategic priority has provided the opportunity to reassert the vital importance of independence, academically robust research and work The Society's work in this area draws on the expertise of our elected Fellows.
7. Election to Fellowship is a public recognition of excellence. Because of the status of Fellowship, all Nominees (except for Honorary Fellows) must go through a rigorous five stage process of assessment. All our Fellows have made an outstanding contribution to the world of learning and have a demonstrable connection to Wales.
8. Fellows are engaged in all aspects of the Society's activities, including its governance, and in the role of being a source of authoritative information. Fellows participate in our public-facing events and provide evidence to inform our policy positions, thus disseminating their research.
9. An example of this includes a symposium *Trwy Brism Iaith / Through the Language Prism* organised by the Society in 2020. Since 2012 there has been a significant decline in both Welsh and Welsh Second Language

A-Level entries.¹ The last decade has also seen a 53% reduction in GCSE modern language entries, and a 48% drop in A-Level entries in Wales, a rate of decline which is increasing.² The symposium emerged from discussions around the need for a broader understanding of language and a holistic view of the experiences, benefits and impacts of living bi- and multilingual lives. A working group of Fellows, supported by Society staff, developed a programme to facilitate an inclusive and wide-ranging dialogue across all aspects of language, from communication, culture and creativity, to identity, understanding and empathy. The discussions drew on research and evidence to interrogate preconceptions about bi- and multi-lingualism, and the recommendations from the event were shared with Welsh Government to help inform the approach to bi- and multi-lingualism in the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.

10. As a charity, the Society is committed to political impartiality. For example, in the run up to the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union in 2016, the Society used factually informed evidence to outline the benefits and disbenefits of membership of the European Union but did not take a position.
11. The Society is valued for its independence and its position as a critical friend to government and the Higher Education sector in Wales. It has been recognised by the First Minister of Wales for its role in expanding the frontiers of knowledge in Wales, and for ensuring that Wales goes on "having a research informed society".³

Are National Academies prominent enough voices in engaging with the variety of debates on the internet?

12. The Learned Society of Wales has limited capacity to engage with or respond to debates on the internet. The Society's free public events (in person and online), our open access longform evidence-informed publications and the shorter form policy positions that we issue make up our contributions to national debates. These outputs are promoted via social media and our distribution lists.
13. It would not be appropriate for the Learned Society of Wales to function as a fact-checker, but within our Fellowship and Early Career Researcher Networks there are experts whose research is an important and often under-used resource to better inform debates. These voices, in addition to the voices of the National Academies as institutions, can ensure that independent evidence-informed contributions are heard in national debates, and as part of policy development. Their contributions provide resources to better inform the appropriate use of evidence in national debates, help people to be more able to identify possible misinformation, and raise awareness of research methodologies and research outcomes.
14. The Society does not at present have capacity to provide a Directory of Expertise. However we promote and amplify the work of Fellows and the research activities of universities in Wales. In 2023 we will be publishing an analysis of the Impact Case Studies submitted by Welsh universities to REF2021 and will develop accessible summaries on key topics which will be widely promoted, to further raise the profile of evidence informed research.
15. The policy work that the Learned Society of Wales undertakes could be better used as a resource by the media – in Wales and beyond. We are actively considering how we can improve the visibility and reach of our work as we develop our next five-year strategy.

¹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/>

² https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_trends_wales_2020.pdf

³ First Minister's address to the Society's Annual Dinner, May 2019